



**UNITED WAY**  
of Albany County

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December 5, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary  
Office of the Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

Dear Madam,

The United Way of Albany County, Wyoming, appreciates the opportunity to comment on the current effort undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission to study the feasibility of designating a three-digit number for the National Suicide Hotline and to assess the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Albany County Wyoming has a Suicide Prevention Task Force that funds a Talk and Text Suicide Prevention Hotline and Wyoming 2-1-1, Inc. is one of our supported members. The comments in this letter are based on the experience of the Albany County Suicide Prevention Task Force of operating a talk and text suicide prevention hotline and our United Way relationship with Wyoming 2-1-1.

Wyoming has one of the highest suicide rates per capita in the United States and Albany County and the City of Laramie, Wyoming, has historically had one of the highest rates in Wyoming. One of the problems in Wyoming has been the lack of accredited local suicide prevention or mental health crisis lines to coordinate with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The result is that there are no hand-offs from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to Wyoming mental health treatment facilities or other local resources available to help persons considering suicide. This inability and the lack of timely responses for text interactions with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, are the primary reasons Albany County created its own local talk and text prevention hotline. Our comments with respect to the creation of a three-digit National Suicide Hotline are as follows:

- The three-digit hotline should be both talk and text capable from the beginning. We are finding our local talk and text line is more often used in a text capability than talk. Approximately two-thirds of the interactions are text.
- The text and talk response must be immediate or within a specified short time. Currently the National Lifeline text response is to feed canned information for up to 20 minutes before the person is engaged. Also, talk response is not timely in many cases. There have been cases in

Wyoming where first responders show up and find the last attempted call was to the National Lifeline, but the call record shows the individual could not connect.

- The three-digit number should be answered locally similar to the 911 system. The funding for establishment of a National three-digit Suicide Hotline should provide funding for the creation of local/state call centers.
- The three-digit National Suicide Hotline must be linked to local first responders and local suicide prevention and mental health treatment resources. Currently, there is no hand-off in Wyoming because there is no connection of the present National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to Wyoming resources. The current 211 network is well suited to providing the link to local resources and should be part of any plan to create a three-digit National Suicide Hotline.

As is evident, I am writing this letter to you today because suicide prevention is an important issue in Wyoming and nationally. As reported recently, United States suicide rates are one of the reasons our life expectancy is decreasing rather than increasing. It is a troubling issue that needs to be addressed with both national and local initiatives and the creation of a three-digit National Suicide Hotline with local or state call centers similar to 911 that is linked to 211 resource information will be a significant help in addressing this problem.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paul Heimer", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Paul Heimer  
Executive Director  
United Way of Albany County